

TESTIMONY

Mr. Chairman, and honored members of the Committee, thank you for allowing me to speak before this distinguished group regarding the concerns of the Indian Elders of North Dakota and in particular the elders of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arickara Tribes. My name is Frederick Baker. I am chairman of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arickara Elder's Organization, an organization that was officially chartered and sanctioned by the Three Affiliated Tribes Business Council, to represent the concerns of our elder population. I have been appointed to the Governor's Committee on Aging for the State of North Dakota.

The elders of the Ft. Berthold Reservation are those folks who are 60 years and older. We were born between the years 1905 and 1942. Our oldest member is 97 years old. There are approximately 573 of us that are in this age range. 307 of us live on the Ft. Berthold Reservation, 74 live outside the Reservation but in North Dakota, and 192 of us are sharing the virtues of North Dakota with other states.

As an age group, we have endured and survived great change. Most of us were born in dire poverty; most of us saw family members die from causes of the frustrations of poverty such as alcohol, despair, poor to none existent health care; most of us are products of off-reservation boarding schools; many of us were given a one way ticket to urban communities such as Los Angeles, Chicago, Dallas, with virtually no preparation of urban survival skills and very limited financial resources (many of us still bear the scars of that experience).

Our age group also went to war in defense of our country. Many of us walked the jungles of the South Pacific, landed at Normandy, defended the frozen ridges of Korea, and saw the monsoons of the Mekong Delta. Many of us returned maimed in body and sometimes in spirit, many of us were returned for burial.

Without question, the most devastating event for us was the Garrison Dam. It was almost as devastating as the smallpox epidemics (1781 and 1837). Prior to the Garrison Dam, we were settled in communities such as Independence, Lucky Mound, Nishu, Shell Creek, Elbowoods, Beaver Creek. We were raising our own food, just like we had been for centuries. Beef replaced the buffalo as our major protein supply, and we proved to be excellent cowboys. The River (Missouri) and its bottomlands provided us good soil for our gardens and crops, shelter for ourselves and our livestock, timber to build our homes, but especially it allowed us to practice our cultural traditions. These traditions helped us to be independent and develop our own systems of caring for ourselves and one another. We didn't need "social" programs. We took care of our children, our elders, our ill. We had our own system of "law and order".

The Garrison Dam changed all of that. We were forced to move from the bottomlands up into the "hills", where the quality of the land was such that it was very difficult to raise gardens. It took many more acres to raise livestock. Our homogeneous communities were broken up, and replaced by isolation. We did not have access to capital, except the

meager amounts of credit that was offered through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Most of this credit was just enough to get one into serious difficulty

Unfortunately, many of our people died in the process of relocating and readjusting from the Garrison Dam. Many of us turned to alcohol, and ourselves and our families suffered as a result. Terms like unemployment, welfare, foster care, spouse abuse, child abuse, elder abuse, alcoholics/alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, “low rent” housing became part of our vocabulary. Our languages are in danger of being lost, and we get confused between poverty culture and Indian Culture.

Despite these difficulties, some members of our age group were the first in their families to earn a college degree; to enter professions such as education, nursing, social work, medicine.

We face many of the same problems today. Among these are inadequate medical care; poor/substandard housing; lack of home health care; elderly abuse issues; inadequate transportation; inadequate meal service. Our written testimony will more clearly document these problems

Let me just highlight a few things:

- Average health care expenditure in the USA is approximately \$3500, while at Ft. Berthold, it is \$1300.
- All of North Dakota is seeing a return of elders who are seriously or terminally ill, hence the drain on the already limited Medicaide resources is critical. We need more Medicaide dollars.
- Set aside for Indian Reservations for meal sites under Title 6 of the Aging Act only is enough to meet a part of the needs of elders.
- Housing is badly needed for elders, and especially assistance is needed in repairing homes. Many elders live in very crowded conditions because their children or grandchildren have no housing and therefore move in with them.
- Elderly abuse is rampant and needs to be addressed by Congress. Please support the pending legislation that will probably be introduced this year.

Thank you for your time, I will be glad to answer any questions that you may have. `

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